



**City Council Meeting Minutes
Monday, July 24th, 2023 - 6:00 p.m.
Council Chambers, City Hall**

Council in attendance: Mayor Jo Brown, Councilor Jay Chandler, Councilor Leigh Webb, Councilor Bob Desrochers, Councilor George Dzujna, Councilor Valerie Blake, Councilor Paul Trudel, Councilor Vince Ribas, Councilor Ted Starkweather and Councilor Olivia Zink

Absent: None

Others in attendance: City Manager Judie Milner, Planning & Zoning Director Seth Creighton, members of the School Board and members of the public.

Mayor Brown called the meeting to order in Council Chambers at 6:00 p.m.

Mayor Brown stated that this is a workshop meeting and there would not be any public comments.

Salute to the Flag was led by Councilor Dzujna.

Agenda Item I.

Economic Development Discussion with Council & School Board.

Mayor Brown asked the city council and school board to go around the table and introduce themselves.

Milner thanked everyone for attending. The Economic Development Task Force, group and team asked to have everyone here because they have done their due diligence with the public and would like to do the same with this group as well. The Economic Development Task Force/Team has one mission, which is growing the tax base to increase property taxes for citywide use. As a reminder, when talking about citywide, she is talking about the municipal departments and the school district together. This task force is responsible for the investments that are made into the community since becoming a team. The team has been holding public forums over the last four months regarding recommended next steps. Quite a few people at the table have attended these forums and have done their due diligence, however, everyone at the table tonight is responsible for the 35,000-foot view of the city. Milner stated that she wanted to take the time to have a conversation with everyone attending tonight. She stated that the team will not be asking for a consensus tonight, instead they will have information from all of the public forums, the seven listening sessions and tonight's workshop after completed to make a unified and educated recommendation to the city council on these projects.

Milner stated that the team is looking at projects that will change the destiny of the city and she would like to discuss these projects that the team is bringing forward as a recommendation and

why, before getting into the funding options. She asked Planning & Zoning Director Creighton to go over the projects.

Creighton listed 4 recommended projects that have been discussed over the past several months. The first three projects are deferred maintenance items that are moving into emergency items. These are things that need to be fixed. Keep in mind that how to fix projects or how to fund them is not the task of this team.

- **City Hall/Opera House**: \$5M is the ballpark amount to be able to renovate.
- **Roads**: \$9.5M has been recommended for this project. It will not fix all of them, but is a good start and the city could tackle the most high-risk roads. The list of roads that need to be repaired is on the Capital Improvements Plan.
- **Trestle Bridge**: This would be about \$3M to repair or up to \$1M to demolish. An example of Vermont was given, which had a very similar bridge that was destroyed after recent rain storms. All of the wood was completely missing afterwards. This could be our reality as well.

The fourth project is not a deferred maintenance item and is not an emergency.

- **White Water Park**: This is not a deferred maintenance or emergency item. \$2.5M is the engineered number to complete this project. This is the least expensive project and has the biggest and possibly the only real return on investment.

Creighton did add that businesses owners come through his department first when they have a plan in place and all of the newer businesses have made Franklin their location based on the publicity of the White-Water Park and the direction that the city is going. Restaurants and industrial properties alike have stated this to him directly.

Creighton concluded stating that he hopes that he was able to give a better view of why these four projects have been recommended by the Economic Development team.

Mayor Brown stated that it was time to take Q&As from the council and school board. Below are some key subjects that were discussed.

- Projects specifically needed for the school district were not selected for this bond. The reason behind this is because these items are on the CIP for capital funding, which is not the responsibility of the Economic Development Taskforce, but the responsibility of the city. What is being recommended are projects that will expand the tax base, which increases that pool. The increase in taxes would then go to the school district and municipal departments.
- The Trestle Bridge was added to the project list for the purpose of getting feedback from the public. The city recently received a grant of almost \$600,000 from NH DOT, which will not cover all of the repairs. It did go towards engineering costs to be able to find out the

exact condition of the bridge. The condition was found to be very bad and NH DOT is requiring the city to come up with a solution, whether it is to repair or demolish the bridge. This will be a community decision and they are required to have so many public forums/hearings on it before a decision is made. There have already been three community forums in the past 18 months on the bridge and the community seems to like the restoration option for \$3.5M the best so far.

- It was made clear by Milner that a bond cannot pay for operating expenditures such as wages, etc. A bond has to be used to pay for something that has a useful life of whatever the bond term is. However, if the bond goes towards projects that have a return on investment, this could definitely go towards CIP items or operating expenditures for both the municipal departments and school district. This is part of the Economic Development Taskforce group sustainability plan.
- New Hampshire has a \$5.5B tourism economy so Franklin is in better shape to capture it than most other states. 81% of tourist spending would go to the city and that will drive real estate investment. This is what pays taxes and supports the schools and the operation of municipal government. NH is unique, as it is 1 of 47 states that does not receive state aid to local government. The best way to build a bigger tax base is through real estate investment.
- Franklin is almost 50% empty downtown. The city needs more businesses to fill them up. With at least 20,000 square feet of unused space downtown that is another \$40M that could be going towards the tax base.
- The City Hall/Opera House project has recently been awarded to an architect for the engineering study and their project schedule is 14 weeks. That is when a more accurate estimate for renovations should be available.
- It was also clarified that the roads project would fall under the terms of the bond, as roads have a useful life of 20-35 years. This is when roads are completely repaired as opposed to repaving without fixing what is underneath.

This concluded the workshop discussion.

Agenda Item II.

Other Business.

Councilor Webb stated that he needed to bring something up that will be effective tomorrow. There was an email sent to the councilors from the City Manager that had an issuance of a letter of hazard from the Fire Chief that will be in effect tomorrow, July 25th, 2023. He wanted to see if the council would consider asking the Fire Chief to delay this letter of hazard until August 6th in

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order to give the downstairs departments time to move upstairs, as well as allowing the performance of the FACT Camp on August 4th & 5th as a favor to the community. Councilor Webb also wanted to know if the delay would be acceptable to the insurer of the building as well.

Milner stated that the council was notified of this letter of hazard that was coming on July 25th, 2023, a year ago. Also, in January, Attorney Fitzgerald spoke to the council about their responsibilities and their non-involvement in directing department heads of the City of Franklin. She does not think it is appropriate for the city council to take a vote that would direct a city department head to do anything, especially on this matter.

She added that this was something everyone was aware of and planned for. The insurance company also knows about it, as it has also been in the paper multiple times. Once the city has a notice of hazard, moving forward after that is not a good move for the city.

Councilor Webb corrected Milner by saying that he is only asking for consideration and not proposing a vote to direct any city department head.

School Board Chair Dow, adjourned the school board, as they had no further questions on the workshop, so that the city council could continue their business.

Milner thanked the school board and the Economic Development Taskforce for attending this meeting.

Mayor Brown asked Milner if she would be able to go to Fire Chief Foss to see if he could delay the notice of hazard until after August 6th and have that answer by tomorrow.

Milner stated that she can do that, but asked the council how that would look to the community. She cautioned against it as it would be difficult to explain the sudden delay after knowing about this date for a year now.

Mayor Brown stated that they could say it was poor planning and she could take the questions from the media. She added that this would be for the kids.

Creighton answered questions about permitting, stating that a permit for renovating this building could take months. That is why an architectural firm was hired, they can do that with their large team and it will take them a proposed 14 weeks to do.

Milner also stated that the city should be setting a precedent. Kettlehead Brewery was also not able to start when they wanted to due to code issues needing to be resolved first.

Councilor Zink reminded everyone that the city elections will still be held in the Opera House this October.

Milner clarified that the code states, after the assembly stops in this building, that the city falls into the code for a business. That is why this floor can still be used for business purposes, and not assembly purposes. There will be a fire watch in abundance of caution in case more than 99 people are here at the same time for city elections. The city clerk is also looking into location options before the presidential primary, since that will have more foot traffic.

Motion – Councilor Ribas moved that it is the sense of the City Council that the City Manager ask the Fire Chief to delay the delivery of the letter of hazard until after the FACT performances. Seconded by Councilor Webb.

There was more discussion on the matter and it was suggested that the word “delay” be amended to say “extension” of the date of hazard, along with changing the original motion from directing the City Manager to asking her.

Motion – Councilor Webb moved that the original motion be amended to change the word “direct” to “ask”. Seconded by Councilor Ribas.

Mayor Brown asked for a vote on the amendment.

6 in favor: 3 opposed. Motion PASSED.

Mayor Brown asked for a vote on the motion as amended.

7 in favor: 2 opposed. Motion PASSED.

No other business was discussed.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Ribas and seconded by Councilor Zink. All in favor. Motion PASSED.

The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa A. Jones
Executive Secretary